

## **Kalamazoo Listening Session Summary**

### **Tuesday, February 21, 2006**

Council Member Present: Mattie Jordan-Woods – Northside Association for Community Development.

Task Force Participant Present: Kathy Fedder – MI Department of Agriculture.

Kirk Heinze, Director of Communication & Technology Services at Michigan State University's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, facilitated the session, and began with brief remarks and instructions for those present. Kristin Brooks, Executive Coordinator for the Michigan Food Policy Council (MFPC), presented the work and the charge of the Council, and introduced the Council representatives present. Approximately 40 people were in attendance at the listening session.

There were fifteen oral presentations of comments, and two written submissions.

- 1) Rose McKenney, community member and food stamp recipient. Ms. McKinney rejected the idea of switching from once-monthly to twice-monthly issuance of food stamp benefits. She said that her monthly food assistance benefits total \$10, and splitting that into two payments would make it virtually useless to her.
- 2) Ed Raak, Michigan Agricultural Surplus System (MASS.) Mr. Raak described the work that MASS does, and the critical service it provides to food banks and hungry people in Michigan. He stated that recent trends toward consolidation in the farming and food processing industries are creating a situation in which the small- and medium-sized farmers and food processors are disappearing. This, in turn, does not bode well for MASS, as large processors and growers do not have the time or inclination to donate slightly blemished goods to MASS. He recommended that the MFPC work to promote/better publicize the tax write-off available to food processors that donate goods to food banks; this tax incentive exists, but is seriously underutilized. He also recommended that the state undertake a study to determine how to encourage food processors to understand that donations to food banks are beneficial to all parties involved. He made it clear that MASS purchases and redistributes food to hungry people in a very effective and value-driven way, and that they should receive acknowledgement and support from the state for this service. In 2005, MASS bought 6 million pounds of agricultural surplus for \$0.099 per pound.
- 3) Elizabeth Forest, Fair Food Matters. Ms. Forest described the work and mission of Fair Food Matters and said that Kalamazoo is 51% food insecure and that the surrounding farmland was rapidly disappearing. She made the following five recommendations to the MFPC:

- a. Increase the number of farmers' markets and increase the capacity of those markets to accept EBT cards.
  - b. Increase the educational programs for consumers, including community gardens and integration of food and nutrition information into school curriculums.
  - c. Specifically support food education and distribution programs in future development of public lands.
  - d. Advise state agencies to work together to increase EBT use at farmers' markets.
  - e. Encourage the development of farmers' cooperatives.
- 4) Ken Dahlberg, Michigan Land Trustees. Dr. Dahlberg focused on recommending a more critical and thorough approach to creating a state plan for biofuel development. He recommended that rather than focusing on an industrial/export scale biofuel economy, instead, the state should try to create more local economies, including markets for biofuels. He recommended that MFPC work to reduce the current dependence on long-distance systems, especially for food. He also recommended that the state work to support alternative energy resources and energy efficiency in farming and food production.
- 5) Stephanie Moore, community member. Ms. Moore made five recommendations to the MFPC:
  - a. Food assistance benefits should *not* be issued twice per month. This would make accessing benefits too difficult for food stamp recipients.
  - b. Food stamp benefits should increase to allow for purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. MSUE should alter its recipes and nutrition education to reflect these expenses. Fresh fruits and vegetables are too expensive for food stamp recipients. Many MSUE nutrition education classes and recipes use fresh fruits and vegetables, but this is inappropriate because food stamp recipients really cannot afford to buy fresh produce.
  - c. Expand the Summer Food Service Program, and increase food stamp benefits during the summer to mothers with children out of school.
  - d. Encourage Sam's Club and other bulk-buying clubs to accept EBT.
  - e. Work with community organizations to create more urban and community gardens.
- 6) Joseph Anderson, community member. Mr. Anderson made the point that the state needs to provide more assistance to low-income hungry people in the communities.
- 7) Anne Lipsey, executive director of Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes. Ms. Lipsey described the work of Kalamazoo Loaves and Fishes, and explained that she is disheartened by the increases in emergency food needs and concurrent decreases in federal and state support for service providers. She said that she feels like "[emergency food providers] have [their] finger in a very leaky dyke." She recommended that the state place a greater emphasis and priority on food security as a national security issue and tie it to economic development efforts.

- 8) Erik Benson, People's Food Co-op employee and organic farm worker. Mr. Benson recommended that the state require product labeling to identify consumer products that contain genetically modified ingredients. He stated that consumers should have full information in order to make their own decisions.
- 9) Jane Bush, Michigan Food and Farming Systems. Ms. Bush recommended that the state reinstate the state meat inspection program to increase jobs, Michigan farmer viability, and food security.
- 10) Tyler Bassett, Fair Food Matters and the Kalamazoo Area Food Systems Inventory. Mr. Bassett identified five issues that should be addressed by the MFPC:
  - a. There is too much food insecurity in Kalamazoo, and in Michigan.
  - b. Food travels too far to get to consumers.
  - c. Farmland is disappearing too quickly in Michigan.
  - d. Local processing facilities have largely disappeared, leaving farmers without options for local processing.
  - e. Small farmers in Michigan need more state assistance to survive.Mr. Bassett also recommended that the MFPC assist farmers in developing distribution co-ops and increase consumer education efforts on local food systems.
- 11) Charles Parker, Lincoln Elementary School (Kalamazoo Public Schools.) Mr. Parker described a program at Lincoln Elementary School wherein low-income students receive a backpack of food to take home over the weekend, when they won't be receiving free or reduced lunches or breakfasts. He noted that programs such as this must continue and be available throughout the state, because children are depending on them to eat. Mr. Parker noted that children should not be hungry, and that emergency food organizations must be equipped and supported by the state in order to run their programs.
- 12) Joe Colyn, food industry consultant for Originz. Mr. Colyn said that the state has underleveraged the huge potential of the agri-food industry. He called for more creative thinking and public-private partnerships to promote the state's second largest industry. He recommended that in conversations about marketing Michigan products "locally", the MFPC define "local" as "Midwest" and work to market Michigan agricultural goods outside of Michigan as well as in Michigan. He also mentioned that Governor Granholm's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jobs Fund should include funds specifically for jobs in food and agriculture.
- 13) Creed Stegall, community member and health advocate. Mr. Stegall mentioned the link between food insecurity and obesity; food security is not just about having enough food, but about having nutritious and affordable food. He recommended that MDCH facilitate more education in low-income communities about purchasing and preparing healthy foods. He emphasized the need for more education about nutrition and healthy eating for food assistance recipients.

- 14) Allison McKenna, board member for Fair Food Matters. Ms. McKenna mentioned that students at Kalamazoo College had recently expressed interest in including local food in the College's food service venues, but when administrators approached their food vendors (large contract holders) about increasing local food availability, the vendors did not even know how to start that process. She expressed frustration at the difficulty in getting Michigan foods into Michigan cafeterias. She recommended that the state provide assistance/guidance to schools and colleges, and to major vendors, looking to incorporate more Michigan foods into their menus/contracts. She also recommended that the state assist farmers in getting their products into local institutions.
- 15) Chris Granaderos, Senior Services, Inc. Ms. Granaderos expressed her organization's enthusiasm for incorporating Michigan foods into their food service. However, they have been very proactive and it has been a big challenge to get Michigan foods. She speculated that there must be a more efficient way to get local foods into local institutions' cafeterias/food service. She recommended that the state look into establishing communication systems and/or educational systems to facilitate these partnerships.
- 16) Shareese Taylor, consumer (written submission.) Ms. Taylor expressed frustration with the federal food assistance system. She is a single mother, working full-time and going to school full-time. Her food assistance benefits, however, are not sufficient to purchase enough food for her and for her child.
- 17) Angela Stephenson, consumer (written submission.) Ms. Stephenson recommended that the MFPC work to create more opportunities for EBT cardholders to access fresh produce, including community gardens, farmers' markets with EBT capacity, and partnering with CSA farms to provide shares to low-income people. She also recommended that the state increase the number of fitness programs and nutrition education services in low-income communities. Ms. Stephenson also mentioned the need to facilitate partnerships between farmers and colleges and schools. Finally, she recommended that the state should have an advisory board of community residents and local farmers to work more closely with low-income communities. Ms. Stephenson expressed disagreement with one oral presenter's recommendation to encourage EBT use at bulk buying clubs; she expressed concern that such clubs and stores would compete too heavily with community grocery stores.

The session concluded with a reminder that the MFPC welcomes written comments and recommendations at any time and that there will be several more regional listening session opportunities in the near future.